

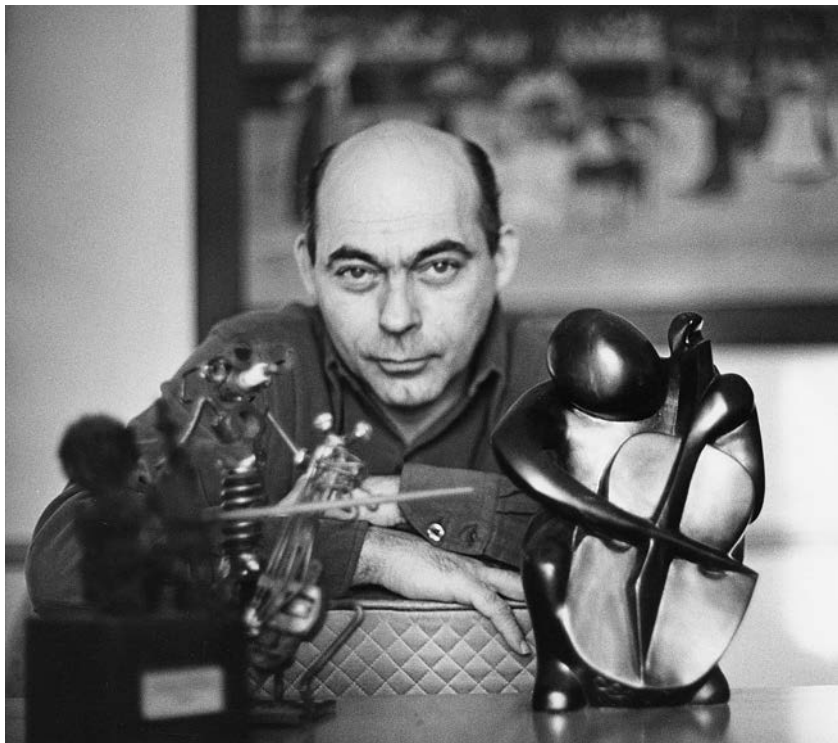


MERCURY
LIVING PRESENCE 35 ^M/_M

JÁNOS
STARKER

THE
MERCURY
LIVING
PRESENCE
RECORDINGS

478 6754 



János Starker

Photo: © Peter Gravina

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH 1685–1750

Complete Suites for unaccompanied cello, BWV 1007–1012

CD 1 478 6819 50.41

No.1 in G major, BWV 1007

1	Praeludium	2.31
2	Allemande	4.28
3	Courante	2.24
4	Sarabande	3.21
5	Menuets I & II	2.55
6	Gigue	1.38

No.2 in D minor, BWV 1008

7	Praeludium	3.15
8	Allemande	2.48
9	Courante	1.25
10	Sarabande	3.39
11	Menuets I & II	2.34
12	Gigue	1.41

No.3 in C major, BWV 1009

13	Praeludium	4.13
14	Allemande	2.55
15	Courante	2.11
16	Sarabande	3.20
17	Bourrées I & II	3.12
18	Gigue	2.11

CD 2 478 6820 62.26

No.4 in E flat major, BWV 1010

1	Praeludium	4.04
2	Allemande	2.47
3	Courante	2.31
4	Sarabande	3.24
5	Bourrées I & II	3.52
6	Gigue	1.38

No.5 in C minor, BWV 1011

7	Praeludium	6.50
8	Allemande	4.13
9	Courante	2.07
10	Sarabande	2.44
11	Gavottes I & II	4.05
12	Gigue	2.35

No.6 in D major, BWV 1012

13	Praeludium	4.42
14	Allemande	4.33
15	Courante	2.35
16	Sarabande	3.22
17	Gavottes I & II	3.36
18	Gigue	2.48

JÁNOS STARKER cello

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Recording Location: Studio A of Fine Recording Studios, New York,
15 April 1963 (BWV 1008 & 1011), 7 & 8 September, 1965 (BWV 1007 & 1012) and
21 & 22 December, 1965 (BWV 1009 & 1010)

Wallet Front Photo: Mary Morris

First Released as SR90445 (BWV 1007), SR90370 (BWV 1008 & 1011),
SR90446 (BWV 1009 & 1010), SR 90447 (BWV 1012)

Total timing 113.07 **ADD**

3 Sonatas for viola da gamba and harpsichord, BWV 1027–1029

arranged for cello and piano

CD 3 478 6821

Sonata No.1 in G major, 1027

1	I Adagio	3.25
2	II Allegro ma non tanto	3.19
3	III Andante	2.21
4	IV Allegro moderato	2.53

Sonata No.2 in D major, 1028

5	I Adagio	1.53
6	II Allegro	3.43
7	III Andante	4.46
8	IV Allegro	3.51

Sonata No.3 in G minor, 1029

9	I Vivace	4.57
10	II Adagio	5.20
11	III Allegro	3.36

JÁNOS STARKER cello

GYÖRGY SEBŐK piano

© 1968 Universal International Music BV

Recording Location: Studio A of Fine Recording Studios, New York, 16 & 17 April 1963

Wallet Front Photos: Mary Morris. Original Cover Design by Rolf Bruderer

First Released as SR90480 · Total timing 40.04 **ADD**



János Starker & György Sebők

Photo: © Harold Lawrence

ITALIAN CELLO SONATAS

CD 4 478 6822

LUIGI BOCCHERINI 1743–1805

Sonata No.4 in A major, G4

1	I Adagio	3.44
2	II Allegro moderato	4.30

ANTONIO VIVALDI 1678–1741

Sonata for cello and continuo in E minor, RV 40

3	I Largo	2.29
4	II Allegro	1.19
5	III Largo	2.19
6	IV Allegro	1.45

ARCANGELO CORELLI 1653–1713

Sonata in D minor, op.5 no.7 arr. August Lindner

7	I Preludio	3.22
8	II Allemanda	1.46
9	III Sarabanda	2.28
10	IV Giga	1.41

PIETRO LOCATELLI 1695–1764

Sonata in D major arr. Alfredo Piatti

11	I Allegro	3.34
12	II Adagio	5.04
13	III Minuetto	5.22

GIUSEPPE VALENTINI 1681–1753

Sonata in E major arr. Alfredo Piatti

14	I Grave	3.01
15	II Allegro	2.06
16	III Allegro (Tempo di gavotta)	1.18
17	IV Largo	2.24
18	V Allegro	3.10

JÁNOS STARKER cello

STEPHEN SWEDISH piano

© 1967 Universal International Music BV

Recording Location: Studio A of Fine Recording Studios, New York, 6 & 7 June 1966

Wallet Front Photo: Mary Morris. Original Cover Design by Jacques Parker

First Released as SR90460

Total timing 51.22 **ADD**

CD 5 478 6823		
1	FELIX MENDELSSOHN 1809–1847 Variations concertantes, op.17	7.49
2	BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ 1890–1959 Variations on a Theme of Rossini	7.32
3	FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN 1810–1849 Polonaise brillante, op.3	8.41
	CLAUDE DEBUSSY 1862–1918 Sonata No.1 in D minor	
4	I Prologue	4.09
5	II Sérénade —	3.23
6	III Finale	3.15
7	BÉLA BARTÓK 1881–1945 Rhapsody No.1, BB 94 Version for cello and piano	10.18
8	LEÓ WEINER 1885–1960 Hungarian Wedding Dance	3.43
	JÁNOS STARKER cello GYÖRGY SEBŐK piano	

© 1965 Universal International Music BV
Recording Location: Studio A of Fine Recording Studios, New York, 17 October 1963
Only original masters used for transfer to Compact Disc
Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd (Martinů; Bartók; Weiner)
Wallet Front Photo: Mary Morris
First released as SR90405
Total timing 48.50 **ADD**

CD 6 478 6824

JOHANNES BRAHMS 1833–1897

Cello Sonata No.1 in E minor, op.38

1	I Allegro non troppo	12.48
2	II Allegretto quasi minuetto	5.02
3	III Allegro	6.07

Cello Sonata No.2 in F major, op.99

4	I Allegro vivace	9.16
5	II Adagio affettuoso	7.09
6	III Allegro passionato	6.45
7	IV Allegro molto	4.23

JÁNOS STARKER cello

GYÖRGY SEBŐK piano

© 1965 Universal International Music BV

Recording Location: Watford Town Hall, Watford, near London, 25 & 26 June 1964

Wallet Front Photos: Mary Morris

First Released on SR90392

Total timing 51.30 **ADD**

CD 7 489 6825

FELIX MENDELSSOHN 1809–1847

Cello Sonata No.2 in D major, op.58

1	I Allegro assai vivace	7.38
2	II Allegretto scherzando	4.54
3	III Adagio	4.54
4	IV Finale: Molto allegro e vivace	7.10

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN 1810–1849

Cello Sonata in G minor, op.65

5	I Allegro moderato	9.44
6	II Scherzo: Allegro con brio	4.18
7	III Largo	3.19
8	IV Finale: Allegro	5.57

JÁNOS STARKER cello

GYÖRGY SEBŐK piano

© 1963 Universal International Music BV

Recording Location: Watford Town Hall, Watford, near London, 8–10 July 1962

Only original masters used for transfer to Compact Disc

Wallet Front Drawings by William Auerbach-Levy

First Released as SR90320 · Total timing 47.54 **ADD**

CD 8 478 6826

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK 1841–1904

Cello Concerto in B minor, op.104

- | | | |
|----------|------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I Allegro | 15.08 |
| 2 | II Adagio ma non troppo | 11.11 |
| 3 | III Finale: Allegro moderato | 11.47 |

MAX BRUCH 1838–1920

- | | | |
|----------|--------------------------|------|
| 4 | Kol Nidrei, op.47 | 9.56 |
|----------|--------------------------|------|

Adagio on Hebrew melodies for cello and orchestra

Adagio ma non troppo

JÁNOS STARKER cello

London Symphony Orchestra

ANTAL DORATI

© 1962 Universal International Music BV

Recording Location: Watford Town Hall, Watford, near London, 6–10 July 1962

Wallet Front Photo: Wesley Bowman Studio, Inc.

First Released as SR90303

Total timing 48.02 **ADD**

CD 9 478 6827

ROBERT SCHUMANN 1810–1856

Cello Concerto in A minor, op.129

- | | | |
|----------|--------------------|-------|
| 1 | I Nicht zu schnell | 10.33 |
| 2 | II Langsam | 4.01 |
| 3 | III Sehr lebhaft | 9.00 |

ÉDOUARD LALO 1823–1892

Cello Concerto in D minor

- | | | |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 4 | I Prélude: Lento — Allegro maestoso | 11.12 |
| 5 | II Intermezzo: Andantino con moto — Allegro presto | 4.59 |
| 6 | III Andante — Allegro vivace | 6.44 |

JÁNOS STARKER cello

London Symphony Orchestra

STANISŁAW SKROWACZEWSKI

© 1963 Universal International Music BV

Recording Location: Watford Town Hall, Watford, near London, 9 & 10 July 1962

Wallet Front Photo: Arnold Newman

First Released as SR90347

Total timing 46.29 **ADD**

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY 1840–1893**Variations on a Rococo Theme, op.33** 15.46

Moderato assai quasi andante

Tema: Moderato semplice

Variazione I: Tempo del tema

Variazione II: Tempo del tema

Variazione III: Andante sostenuto

Variazione IV: Andante grazioso

Variazione V: Allegro moderato

Variazione VI: Andante

Variazione VII e Coda: Allegro vivo

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS 1835–1921**Cello Concerto No.1 in A minor, op.33****[2]** Allegro non troppo — Animato — Allegro molto — Tempo I — 5.36**[3]** Allegretto con moto — Tempo I — 5.35**[4]** Un poco meno allegro — Più allegro (Tempo I) — Molto allegro 7.27**JÁNOS STARKER** cello**London Symphony Orchestra****ANTAL DORATI**

© 1965 Universal International Music BV

Recording Location: Watford Town Hall, Watford, near London, 26 & 27 June 1964

Wallet Front Design by George Maas & Harold Lawrence

First Released as SR90409

Total timing 34.24 **ADD****JÁNOS STARKER on Recording Memories**

When my longtime friend Wilma Cozart Fine suggested that I reflect on my recording memories, the floodgates opened. Paris, 1948, my first 78 on wax; 1950, first LPs in New York, continuing on into the Eighties, mostly in New York, Amsterdam, London and Berlin. Then the digital CD era in England, New York, Munich, St Louis, Tokyo, etc. In 1951, the first recordings for Mercury with the Roth Quartet and Robert Fine, the innovator-genius with the microphones. Later, Harold Lawrence, the man with the infallible ear and taste. Antal Dorati, a lifelong friend, probably the only conductor then, with Stokowski, who understood the difference between a live performance and a recording.

In the Sixties I wrote an essay called "Take One Take Nine" in which I discussed the differences between stage performances and studio playing. On stage, minor technical mishaps are of little significance. Personality, communicative power and convincing artistry take precedence. On a record, repeated hearing magnifies shortcomings, technical and musical. Long pauses become dead silences, versus the almost religious, trance-like unity of audience and artist on stage. Theatrical gestures, effective on stage, are of no consequence in the studio. Adrenalin flow has no effect on the microphone nor on the record listener. It brings uncontrolled speeds, crude dynamics, conceptual failings and a lack of structural unity.

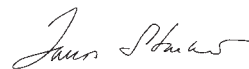
To mind comes the loneliness of recording Bach Suites. The evolution of the priorities: first, technical exactness, then structure, beauty of sound and, eventually, the assumed

emotional content of Bach's music. All these, while the re-emergence of the "authentic" Baroque practices dampen the Twentieth century's expectations, let alone the projected Twenty-first century's dreams.

Against the solo loneliness stands the joyous camaraderie between soloist, orchestra and conductor; the seldom-matched cooperation with Dorati, making the tape editors work minimally. Then I remember the homelike atmosphere of recording with lifelong friends, such as György Sebök, knowing that each and everyone respects the other and regales in the pleasure of re-creating masterpieces.

It is often asked what an artist prefers, concerts or recordings or, in my case, teaching. My answer has always been that one without the other would make my life incomplete. In addition, I believe that recording is a testament. One is allowed to make a statement, under the best circumstances, of his or her views of a given composition, at a particular stage in the artist's life. There is no audience distraction, no coughs, no baby cries, and errors can be corrected within reason.

Looking back at my life, there are few highlights — children, grandchildren born — that can match the elation felt when leaving a hall or studio and hearing the crew say, "It's in the can."



János Starker

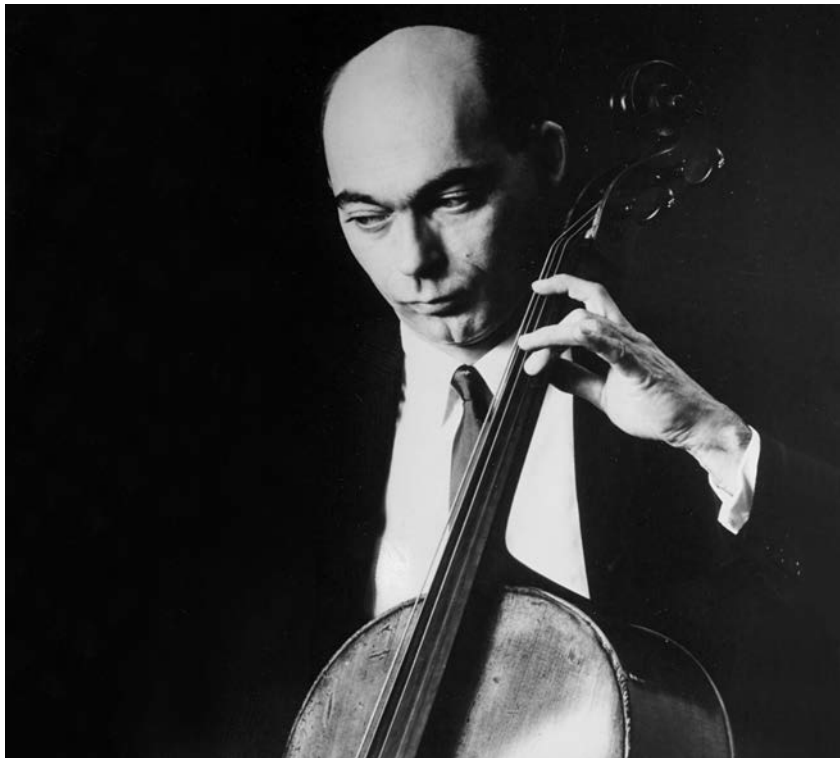


Photo: © Harold Lawrence

JÁNOS STARKER

János Starker was an aristocrat of the cello and an impeccable virtuoso who adorned the American musical scene for more than six decades. As a man, he had a most distinctive personality and was fearlessly honest. Despite being Hungarian raised and trained, having Hungarians as his closest friends and winning a reputation as the brightest star of the Hungarian cello school, Starker was deeply marked by early traumas and wrote: “when I recall my twenty-two years in Hungary, I feel only joy and a sense of belonging in being an American.”

He was born in Budapest on 5 July 1924 into a Jewish immigrant family. His father was a tailor, and it was his mother who dreamed of having musical sons. His elder brothers were encouraged to be violinists, and at six János was given a cello. After lessons with Fritz Teller failed, his parents approached Adolf Schiffer, a pupil of David Popper and his successor at the Franz Liszt Academy. At first János worked weekly with an assistant, seeing Schiffer every fortnight. In 1931 he heard Pablo Casals and was introduced to the great man by Schiffer. “My fate was sealed,” he recalled. “Two years later, when I was already in the preparatory class of the Academy, I attended a recital in which Béla Bartók played with Emanuel Feuermann. It was a

revelation. I felt sure that was how a cello should sound.” Besides Schiffer, his tutors included quartet leader Imre Waldbauer and composer Leó Weiner. He himself began teaching aged eight — his pupil, six-year-old Eva Czako, would join him many years later on the Indiana University faculty.

In 1938, at six hours’ notice, Starker gave his first performance with orchestra of Dvořák’s Concerto; and in 1939 he revived Zoltán Kodály’s formidable solo sonata, unheard for years. But Hungarian anti-Semitism became rampant during World War II, the Germans invaded in 1944, and many members of Starker’s family were lost in the Holocaust, including his brothers. He himself spent three months in a labour camp and was almost killed by American bombing. But somehow he, his first wife Eva and their parents survived.

In Paris in 1947, he made 78rpm discs of Kodály’s sonata, which won the Grand Prix du Disque; and when the composer was in Paris the following spring, Starker was in demand at every gathering. Even more crucial was a meeting with another compatriot, the conductor Antal Dorati, who got him to America as principal cellist of the Dallas Symphony. Yet another Magyar, Fritz Reiner, poached him for the Metropolitan Opera, New York; and in 1953 he went with Reiner to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

— he saw working with Reiner as the high point of his early career.

Starker made his London debut in 1957 with a sold-out Wigmore Hall recital, and at the Edinburgh Festival he played all six Bach solo Suites in two concerts for the first time. Having left Chicago in 1958, he took up the professorship at Indiana University School of Music that made him the most celebrated cello teacher in America — among his pupils were Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi, Gary Hoffman and Maria Kliegel. He continued teaching until nine months before his death, which came on 28 April 2013. Students found him candid to the point of bluntness, but also humorous, exceptionally analytical, and able to defuse awkward moments with clever diversions.

From the 1960s Starker was among the world's top soloists, famed for his inscrutable concert platform demeanour. His bow arm was the envy of colleagues, his legato was immaculate, and his left hand delivered pinpoint intonation. In all these attributes, he was Feuermann's heir. His tone, though not large, was instantly recognisable with its insistent vibrato, and so keenly focused that it carried in concertos — he invented a bridge which he felt increased its penetration. Over the years he took part in several ensembles, but his most effective chamber music liaison was with his old friend György Sebók, a superb pianist with whom he toured and

recorded for more than a decade. Among works written for him were concertos by Dorati, Bernhard Heiden, Miklós Rózsa, Chou Wen-Chung, Juan Orrego-Salas and Robert Starer. He did not own a cello until 1946. For fifteen years he borrowed the "Lord Aylesford" Strad, but in 1965 he acquired a Matteo Goffriller, and later he also had an Andrea Guarneri. He was a great smoker, enjoyed a glass of Scotch and wrote readable, whimsical stories, some published in his 2004 autobiography *The World of Music According to Starker*, others in Joyce Geeting's 2008 book *János Starker, King of Cellists*.

János Starker made myriad records, but collectors single out his Mercury performances for their clear sound quality and realistic balance. Of his three versions of Dvořák's Concerto, for example, most connoisseurs prefer the second, made for Mercury with the London Symphony Orchestra and his friend Dorati. The same combination worked well in Saint-Saëns' popular A minor Concerto, Bruch's *Kol Nidrei* and Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo Theme*. For the Lalo and Schumann concertos, the LSO was directed by another sympathetic collaborator, the Polish composer-conductor Stanisław Skrowaczewski. The relentlessly critical Starker was pleased with his Mercury records; and working with congenial colleagues was a factor in their success.

A number of sonatas were taped with György Sebók at the piano: Bach's three for viola da gamba, the two by Brahms and those by Chopin, Mendelssohn (the second only) and Debussy. Shorter bravura works by Mendelssohn, Chopin and Martinů became benchmarks of virtuosity for other cellists; and the duo included pieces by Bartók and their teacher Weiner. For a recital of old Italian sonatas, Starker's partner was

the American pianist Stephen Swedish, who was still a student at Indiana when they first worked together. Inevitably, among the Mercury projects was a set of the Bach solo suites, three recorded with the Strad, three with the Goffriller. Starker's lean, athletic interpretations of these cornerstones of the repertoire were amazingly consistent across five recorded cycles and four decades.

Tully Potter



Starker with Antal Dorati & the LSO

Photo: © Harold Lawrence

TAKE ONE, TAKE NINE

8:30 P.M.

The house lights dim, the artist comes on stage. Applause reminds him of his responsibility to give his very best to the audience assembled — people who have traveled to the hall and bought tickets expressly to hear him. He must give his best under the prevailing conditions. And what are these? A hall subject to every kind of acoustic anomaly caused by cold, warmth and humidity. Perhaps the concert has been preceded by travel hazards in cars, trains, and planes, or perhaps by insufficient rehearsal, sometimes with an orchestra of poor quality. His instrument may have reacted to changes in temperature and altitude, not to mention that the artist himself may respond physically or mentally to any given combination of factors.

So he performs. The music is drawn from his repertory; he knows it intimately and has played it many times previously all over the world. However, because of the complicated conditions involved, small accidents happen. A finger slips or a note doesn't "sound" right. As the artist adjusts to conditions beyond his control, some phrasings change, dynamics are altered, tempi vary, but the overall concept comes through. His communicative powers function. His personality, combined with a consistently

high standard of playing, wins him the appreciation of his audience. Little accidents and incidents are over in a moment and forgotten. Sheer musical enjoyment remains with the listener. "Take One" was a success.

10:00 A.M.

In a recording studio, the artist takes his assigned place. Surrounding him are the orchestra, the conductor, the sound engineer, the producer, and assorted others, all prepared to create a recording of the highest possible level and quality — a recording to be heard throughout the world, to be scrutinized by critics and reviewers, but above all to be listened to repeatedly by music lovers and musicians. On a recording, the magnetism of an artist's presence does not exist; the experience is not shared with an audience under the same roof and the same conditions. Fleeting discrepancies in a live performance are magnified to the point of annoyance or distress during repeated hearings, as the listener grows more and more familiar with the qualities of the artist. Before the advent of magnetic tape only slight adjustments could be made to a recording, and the intention therefore was to capture celebrated performances by an artist. These recordings were, in a way, like unretouched photographs; they showed the

artist as he truly was at that moment, like a woman without makeup. Thus, only a tiny fraction of the thousands of early recordings are able to withstand the judgment of time and the rising standards of performance.

Today, the artist leaves the recording studio feeling as though he has given testimony under oath — testimony about a certain composition as it appears to him during a particular stage in his artistic life. In the studio, he has on his side all the acoustical advantages of a concert hall built with the greatest care. He has highly trained sound engineers and technicians working with him, and above all he has a musician-producer, who, through constant labor with tape, has developed an ear capable of detecting the slightest tonal changes, variations in tempo, and momentary inaccuracies. The tape machine permits innumerable stops and starts — retakes — to correct even minute musical errors. The artist is thereby given the opportunity to achieve a performance he considers truly his own — provided his concept of a work has been clearly and decisively defined — by repeating movements, sections, even single measures until he is satisfied with them. (Since it is costly to keep an orchestra in session for repeated takes, however, the artist whose technique requires too much time to record will find himself less often engaged.) The takes are then assembled into a final "master." However, if his concept of

the work isn't clearly defined, tempi and dynamics will vary on different takes and the end product will reflect this lack of unity. The artist will not recognize his own playing, let alone give any impression of a coordinated performance. Such a performance could be compared to a composite drawing of a wanted fugitive.

The clearly defined concept of a piece being recorded thus differs in many respects from the version an artist plays in concert. This is of course abhorrent to some puritans, who maintain that only the composer and his message matter. On the one hand they reject any calls for adjustment because of the vagaries of a concert hall, but on the other they make specific demands of the microphone and the disc.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding about such adjustments, let me attempt to be exact. Music consists of horizontal (melodic) and vertical (harmonic and rhythmic) elements in various combinations. Artists are differentiated by their respective mixes of these elements. On records, the vertical elements must outweigh the horizontal; stronger accents and more distinct, clearer harmonies are essential. Excessive speed created by tension and temperament often makes the music unintelligible, while slow or lingering tempi become dull, and rests become dead silences instead of spiritual communication. Dynamic changes have to be exaggerated

and accentuated, although extremes need to be avoided. The nearly inaudible whisper of sound means nothing on a record, although it may be overpowering in the concert hall; the climactic *fortissimo* that may be overpowering in concert can sound like sheer noise on a record. Technical details require far more attention; blurred attacks, ill-timed slides, mechanical noises from an instrument are heard much more acutely by the microphone than by an audience listening at some distance from their point of origin. A wide *vibrato* creates faulty intonation on discs rather than tonal warmth. The high-fidelity stereophonic record projects music with such intimacy that even the sounds of breathing become part of the performance, an approximation of the artist's presence.

Tension can be applied in spurts while sections of music are being recorded, but overall structural considerations have to be strong enough that, regardless of the number of stops and retakes, the unity of a composition will not suffer. No one can say

whether any artist is able to fully submit himself to the notated demands of the composer, whether in live concert or in recording. Nor can anyone say in good conscience how much of a performance is the composer's and how much is the re-creating artist's. Recording as we know it today is a recent art, and a collective art as well. The producer, unsung hero that he is, is nearly as responsible for a recording as the composer and the performer. It will be some time until the art of "Take Nine" can be judged by its own norms on its own merits. Just as no one any longer questions the artistic values of cinematography and no one in theater fears its competition, no one should regard recordings as a threat to live music. They are two distinctly different artistic expressions, albeit related in their ultimate goal of re-creating, to the best extent possible, the works of the masters.

János Starker
Bloomington, Indiana, 1963

THE RECORDINGS — ORIGINAL LP SLEEVE NOTES

CDs 1 & 2

J.S. BACH: COMPLETE SUITES FOR UNACCOMPANIED CELLO

The six years that Bach served as *kapellmeister* and director of chamber music at the court in Cöthen were extraordinarily fruitful ones. Between 1717 and 1723 he presented his royal employer, Prince Leopold, with one instrumental masterpiece after another: the *Orgelbüchlein*, the first book of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, the Two- and Three-Part Inventions, the English and French Suites for harpsichord, six Suites for Solo Cello, six Sonatas for Solo Violin, the Brandenburg Concertos and the four orchestral Suites. Although the Cello Suites were probably completed in 1720, the exact year of composition as well as the circumstances which inspired Bach to this particular task remain a mystery. Some musicologists have advanced the theory that we have Cöthen's prodigiously gifted cellist and gambist, Christian Ferdinand Abel, to thank for these Suites. Whether true or not, it is indeed certain that such a challenging assignment — overcoming the limitations imposed by a solo cello — must have immediately appealed to Bach.

Additional mysteries surround these Suites due to the fact that the original manuscript has been lost and most modern

editions have been based on two facsimiles, one copied out by Bach's second wife, Anna Magdalena, and the other by his pupil, Kellner. These documents, however, contain, in addition to several obvious mistakes, many important omissions regarding bowings, ornaments, tempo markings, dynamics, and the like, and present the performer with a good deal of editorial work. In fact, most cellists prepare their own performing editions of the Suites.

The suite has had a long and distinguished history. Along with the sonata, it was one of the first purely instrumental forms to be cultivated by composers. The origins of the suite date far back into the Middle Ages when lutenists took the popular dances of the day and fashioned a cycle from them. Gradually the dances lost their more obvious terpsichorean characteristics as musicians adapted them to an idiomatic instrumental style. By Bach's time the dances had become totally abstract and stylized; only the basic rhythms and formal structures were retained. What attracted Bach and his contemporaries to the suite and its dances were the possibilities they offered in contrasting mood, tempo, metre, and rhythm (not, however, tonality, which remained constant throughout).

The Cello Suites, unlike Bach's other

works in this form, follow an unvarying six-movement pattern: 1) Prelude, 2) Allemande, 3) Courante, 4) Sarabande, 5) Menuet or Bourrée or Gavotte, and 6) Gigue. All the dances are bipartite, each section being played twice. The Menuet, Bourrée, and Gavotte are double movements in the classical A B A form, i.e. Menuet I, Menuet II, Menuet I (a form which was carried directly over into the third movement of the classical symphony).

Prelude: The improvisatory nature of the Prelude — arpeggiated chords, scale passages, and free cadenzas — hearkens back to the medieval lutenists who, before embarking upon the individual dances, tested the tuning of their instrument with a similar fantasia-like improvisation.

Allemande: As its name suggests, the allemande has a German origin. It is a slow dance, generally in 4/4 metre and with a strikingly ornamental melodic line.

Courante: The French courante was originally a wooing dance performed in pantomime. It is in direct contrast to the allemande — light, rapid, and flowing (hence its name).

Sarabande: The origins of this dance are somewhat obscure, but the generally accepted theory states that the sarabande developed in Spain where it had been introduced early in the seventeenth century by the Moors. Although the sarabande became the epitome of the refined and

stately court dance, Padre Mariana (1536–1623) in his *Treatise Against Public Amusements* damned the dance with sentiments that have a familiar ring: “lascivious in words and ugly in movements ... enough to inflame even very modest people.” Although the sarabande is usually followed by a set of “doubles” or variations on the original melody with extremely elaborate ornamentation, those in the Cello Suites are single movements.

Menuet: (Suites 1 and 2): The name comes from the French *pas menu* meaning “small step”, suggesting the graceful nature of this dance.

Bourrée: (Suites 3 and 4): A rapid, *alla breve* dance, the bourrée (from the French *bourrir*, “to flap wings”) still retains, in its baroque dressing, the flavour of its rustic origins.

Gavotte: (Suites 5 and 6): Another bright dance, the gavotte eventually evolved into one of the most popular and sophisticated of court dances. Musicologist Curt Sachs has traced the name back to the Gavots, inhabitants of Gapençais in Upper Dauphiné.

Gigue: This dance, in lively triplets, came from England where it was often seen at the court of Queen Elizabeth. The name may stem from the French *giguer*, “to dance”, or from the German word *Geige*, meaning “fiddle”.

This particular order of dances is a most

satisfactory one, providing an aesthetically pleasing group of contrasts and balances: the virtuosic brilliance of the Prelude is followed in turn by the reflective Allemande, the rapid Courante, the noble and harmonically intense Sarabande, the light and sprightly Menuet or Bourrée or Gavotte, and the vivacious Gigue, which provides the final flourish. And although Bach probably did not intend the six Suites to be played consecutively at a single concert, the complete set, like the six separate dances, also has a definite sense of unity. Despite the great musical variety of the individual movements, each Suite has its own distinct character, well designed to contrast and complement its neighbour. The easy-going charm of Suite No.1 is countered by the introspection and pathos of No.2; the complexity and bravura of No.3 contrast with the geniality of No.4; and the tragic grandeur and richness of No.5 find their foil in the brilliant virtuoso excitement of No.6.

Suite No.1 in G major

The pungent, rich tone of the First Suite arises from Bach's exploitation of the instrument's open strings (C, G, D, and A). The Prelude, written in continuous sixteenth notes, betrays its improvisatory origins in running passage-work and arpeggiated figures. After tense pedal points on the open A string and on the open D, the movement works up to a dramatic climax.

The sixteenth notes of the Prelude also dominate the Allemande, whose duple time suggests that it is to be taken rather faster than customary. The Courante is in the Italian style — again with busy sixteenth-note passages. Bach uses double and triple stops on the open strings to great effect in the Sarabande. Here both the harmonic bass movement and the contrapuntal intricacies of the solo line are more suggested than made explicit. Bach has written the lines so cannily that the listener instinctively fills in what the solo cello cannot supply. The two Menuets are extremely light in character, simple and charming. They prepare us for the Gigue, in 6/8 metre, whose outward simplicity disguises a wealth of rhythmic and harmonic subtleties. Part of the humour of the piece comes from occasional unexpected syncopations.

Suite No.2 in D minor

The Second Suite has more breadth than the First; the key of D minor almost always evoked a pathetic and noble *Innigkeit* from Bach. The Prelude, as in the First Suite, is constructed along the lines of a free fantasia, although the music here is more melodic and reflective. The Allemande is in 4/4 time and continues the note of pathos struck in the Prelude. Another Italian Courante follows, rapid and urgent. Again the Sarabande is harmonically very rich and full

with multiple-stopped chords punctuating the harmonic pattern. The two Menuets are well contrasted: the first is harmonically thick-textured and in the minor, the second is based primarily on scale passages and playful leaps and is in the tonic major. The concluding Gigue, while retaining its basic swinging triple pulse, is still rather sombre and in keeping with this Suite's dark colours.

Suite No.3 in C major

Even more than the Suite in G major, No.3 in C brings out the warm richness of the instrument by using the low open C string as a sonorous underpinning to the numerous four-part chords. The Prelude is in a larger cast than its predecessors: a continual declamation of sixteenth notes, producing great waves of arpeggio and scale motifs. A vehement coda dotted with several powerful four-part chords brings the music to a conclusion. The figuration of the Allemande is more elaborate in this Suite and the movement takes on a new complexity in both its thematic and rhythmic development. By way of contrast, the Courante is a relatively modest study in arpeggios and scale fragments. As we have come to expect, the Sarabande offers the fullest harmonic texture. In the extended second section we are led to the far-off key of D minor by means of some striking modulations. Relief from this drama comes from the two genial Bourrées, the second

of which is in the tonic minor. The Suite ends with one of Bach's most sprightly and melodically inventive Giges.

Suite No.4 in E flat major

The Fourth Suite offers us a moment of relaxation from the increasing intensity and complexity experienced in the first three Suites — and prepares us for the mighty No.5 and virtuosic No.6. The first section of the Prelude consists of evenly flowing arpeggiated figures. After a short pause on a low C sharp, a series of fantasia-like cadenzas take us with astonishing ease and naturalness through several unrelated tonalities before the concluding E-flat chord. The Allemande, an *alla breve* movement, owes its special charm to the juxtaposition of smooth scale fragments and unexpected leaps. The Courante offers a variety of rhythmic movement in alternating eighth notes, triplet eighths, and sixteenths. There is an actual bass line rather than an implied one in the Sarabande, for here Bach uses double and triple stops continuously. The first Bourrée is unusually elaborate and unusually developed while Bourrée No.2, dominated by staid quarter-note motion, is simplicity itself. The Gigue concludes with an infectious *perpetuum mobile*.

Suite No.5 in C minor

For the Fifth Suite Bach directs the player to tune his A string a full tone down to G. This

retuning (*scordatura* is the technical term for it) enables the cellist to play certain chords that on a normally tuned instrument would be extremely awkward. The tone of the music is immediately set by the Prelude which departs from the improvisatory style of the other five Suites and is cast in the form of a French Overture: a slow *alla breve* fantasia opening section followed by a rapid two-voice fugue in 3/8 metre. Although the fugue is not as elaborately worked out as those in the solo violin sonatas, Bach's achievement here is an impressive example of implied counterpoint. The Allemande is not the type of gently flowing melody we have become accustomed to from the previous Suites; the scope is considerably enlarged, motivic germs are fully developed with extensive figuration, and dotted rhythms are prominent. The Italian Courante is here replaced by the French version of the dance: 3/2 metre instead of 3/4 and dotted rhythms instead of a steadily flowing melodic line. The Sarabande also differs from those heard earlier: it is quite short and, although the harmonic tension is great, there are no double stops. Bach evidently did not want the Suite to become too top-heavy. The two Gavottes are both in the minor mode, No.1 featuring leaps and chords, No.2 flowing triplet passages. The Gigue, its dotted 3/8 triplet rhythm reminiscent of the *siciliana*, ends the Suite on a melancholy tone.

Suite No.6 in D major

Bach wrote this Suite for a five-stringed cello, an instrument which included an E string tuned a fifth above the A string. This accounts for the high tessitura of the music. Since the Suite is always played on an ordinary cello today, the music presents several unusual technical problems. The Prelude is a long one, in 12/8 metre, a *perpetuum mobile* movement that spans a wide range. In measure eighty-three, the eighth-note triplets double into sixteenths, providing the concluding measures with a brilliant cadenza. The Allemande is a slow, highly ornate version of the dance, reaching into the upper reaches of the cello register and presenting a notable challenge to the cellist's skill in sustaining legato phrases. Extensive leaps and broken chords characterise the Courante which is once more in the Italian style. The Sarabande is in 3/2 and the expansive chording gives the music a rather pompous personality. Both Gavottes are in the major mode and both are sunny, happy pieces, among Bach's most infectious and outgoing inspirations. A brilliant Gigue concludes the set on a sparkling note of triumph.

Starker on Bach

János Starker completed recording the six Cello Suites just before Christmas 1965 in New York City at Fine Recording's Studio A. Unless you have attended a recording

session, it is difficult to appreciate the rather terrifying loneliness that surrounds an artist in a project of this sort — a lone cellist facing the microphones with only his cello and Bach for company. The hard work that went into the making of these records was not without its compensating lighter moments, however. After successfully completing a perfect take of the Fourth Suite's Courante, Starker celebrated by giving an impromptu performance of the same Courante complete with ultra-romantic *rubato*, a vibrato that verged upon a constant chain of trills, and several syrupy glissandos. Recording director Harold Lawrence felt this was too good to miss and immediately set the tape recorders in motion to catch a never-to-be-released collector's item.

This little demonstration brought up the knotty problem of Bach style. Like most cellists, Mr Starker has studied and performed Bach's Suites since boyhood. Because of the lack of a definitive manuscript giving all of Bach's specific performing instructions, every cellist must in a sense be his own stylistic editor, and on this subject Mr Starker makes his position quite clear. "An excessive amount of literature has been produced about the Bach style, based on much research into the eighteenth century's musical performing art. It should be evident, therefore, that whatever source of information one takes

as a leading principle, the results can be greatly varied. The 'tradition' started almost 200 years after the works were conceived (by Pablo Casals, who is almost solely responsible for introducing these Suites to the concert public of our century), and one can trace its origin to the artistic trend of the turn of the twentieth century and thereafter.

"Any attempt to classify a performance of this music as a truly Bach presentation is futile and baseless. The equipment of the contemporaneous cello is quite different from that of those used in Bach's time. The very fact that these works are performed today in a concert hall makes necessary completely different solutions. The change in our mentality since the eighteenth century excludes the possibility of adopting the artistic motivations suggested by or assigned to Bach and his instrumentalists.

"So all the observable changes, whether they involve notes, ornaments, phrases, dynamics, or tempi, should be attributed to the personal expressive desire of each player, and the validity of each approach will rest solely on the communicative power of its deliverer. No tradition or truth can be invoked to justify any attempt which does not satisfy the needs and requirements of the already accepted standards of instrumental playing of our time, and does not satisfy the needs of our present-day concert halls. The continuous change in both will sometimes bring seemingly radical

new approaches, but this should only enrich our experience and enjoyment of these works. As the organist Widor said: 'What speaks through Bach's music is pure and religious emotion, and this is one and the same in all men in spite of national and religious differences. It is the emotion of the infinite and the exalted for which words are always inadequate expression, and which can find proper utterance only in art ... We are made one by what we admire in common and comprehend in common.'"

Peter G. Davis, 1966

CD 3

J.S. BACH: SONATAS, BWV 1027–1029

By 1717, when Bach left the court of Weimar, most of his greatest organ works had already been written. His choral writings were to come later, at Leipzig, between 1723 and his death in 1750. But a large share of his instrumental music emanated from the short but prolific span between 1717 and 1723 spent at the court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. During this period Bach composed his celebrated Brandenburg Concertos, his six Suites for unaccompanied cello, Volume One of the Well-Tempered Clavier, and a variety of chamber works including the three Sonatas, BWV 1027–1029.

Bach's concentration on instrumental

writing at this time was due more to circumstance than inspiration. Cöthen had no outstanding organ to compose for, and it was a Calvinistic or "reformed" city in which religious practices forbade the use of art music in church. Although Bach scholars will hasten to point out that the St. John Passion was composed while Bach was still at Cöthen, it should be noted that the Passion is more properly part of the composer's Leipzig period, since it was written, during Bach's last weeks at Cöthen, as a kind of "audition" for his Leipzig post.

Despite its limitations, Cöthen did provide Bach with a unique creative environment. His employer was a musical devotee who could truly appreciate Bach's accomplishments. Prince Leopold gave Bach the freedom to choose his own instruments and forms and permitted him to accept additional commissions from patrons outside the city. Since the prince himself played several instruments quite well, he took a personal interest in his court musicians and provided well for them.

It seems likely that Bach's entire career might have taken a different turn — that he might have stayed longer at Cöthen — had not the prince decided to marry a woman who deplored music. Leopold grew so distracted by his wife's extravagant social whims that he became increasingly disassociated from the musical life at court. Bach, who had lost his own wife

and remarried while at Cöthen, grew professionally restless and sought employment elsewhere. When Leopold's wife died in 1723, the composer had already determined to leave for Leipzig, where he had been offered a post only after it was refused by two other contenders (one of whom was G.P. Telemann).

Among the instruments at which the Cöthen prince was most accomplished were the viola da gamba and several of the clavier family, and it was with Leopold's capabilities in mind that Bach scored the three sonatas heard here. The clavier he intended was the cembalo, a precursor of the harpsichord, named for its bell-like tone. The viola da gamba, which had a register somewhere between those of the present-day viola and the cello, was already becoming obsolete when the sonatas were composed, and at this time there was a rivalry between instruments of the violin family, then rapidly developing in Italy, and those of the disappearing viol family. Bach's sonatas are historically significant in that they are among the few pieces in the eighteenth-century literature known to have been scored for viola da gamba and cembalo as solo instruments. (This combination, of course, was frequently employed as the *continuo* of a larger chamber group.) In this connection, it is interesting that Bach evidently initially conceived of the first sonata (S1027) as a work for two flutes

with clavier and then rescored it, probably in deference to his patron's preference. As in duo sonatas of the later Classical period, the keyboard instrument in the three gamba sonatas is not relegated to a mere accompanying role but is an active participant with a melodic and harmonic, as well as contrapuntal, function.

Both Bach and Telemann continued to make use of the viola da gamba's reedy tonal clarity well after the emergence of the violin family. The Italian composer Benedetto Marcello, among others, realised the similarity in character between the older instrument and the new cello, and he scored some of his sonatas for "violincello a viole di gamba" (sic), making the two practically interchangeable as solo instruments.

It should be mentioned, though, that the viola da gamba was actually in several essential ways quite different from the cello. It generally featured six strings, and these were lighter, longer and less tense than those of the violin family. Its bridge was much less arched, its neck and body thinner and less sturdy. It retained the gut frets and C-shaped sound holes of early instruments and was still played with a highly curved bow. Played "at the leg", as its name suggests, the viola da gamba was more difficult to control than the cello and could not produce the sharp accents characteristic of cello music. It is peculiar that in spite of similarities in register and

tone, the viola da gamba and the cello are not directly related: The double bass, not the cello, is said to have derived from the viola da gamba. The ancestry of the cello, on the other hand, has been traced to a different branch of the viol family — the viola da braccio, played "on the arm".

Nevertheless, today Bach's gamba sonatas are usually played on the cello, occasionally on the viola. The magnificence and accessibility of some of Bach's better-known chamber pieces have tended to minimise the exposure of these sonatas. But they have been acknowledged in their own right as examples of Bach's finest writing, graceful and eloquent and ingratiating.

Carol Frances Brown, 1968

CD 4 ITALIAN CELLO SONATAS

Arrangements and the Cello Repertoire

The concept of "arrangement" is not so simple a one as those of us who raise puristic eyebrows at it tend to assume. There are several levels of arranging. To begin with, even when we hear a Beethoven symphony, the sound is very different from what the composer would have heard or, in the years of his deafness, imagined. Stringed instruments, and especially the materials used to string them, have

changed, and so has the technique of playing them; woodwinds in general have a smoother, more refined sound now, trombones a more powerful one; modern trumpets and horns are completely different in tone-quality from the natural (non-valved) instruments Beethoven knew. So it would not be stretching a point too far to say that any modern performance of a Beethoven symphony is in a sense an arrangement.

In a programme like that recorded here, a network of similar considerations hedges the question "piano or harpsichord". Quite apart from the differences between the modern piano or harpsichord and its eighteenth-century precursor, there have been changes too in the nature of the instrument that the piano or harpsichord is to accompany. Two of the works — the Boccherini and the Vivaldi — were probably written for cello originally. But then to Vivaldi the sound of the viola da gamba was probably at least as familiar, in bass string parts, as that of its successor the cello — and just as a combination of viola da gamba with piano would sound decidedly odd, so it may plausibly be argued that the tonal quality of good modern cello-playing is better served by the accompanimental resources of an equally modern concert grand than it would be by the less ample resonance of a harpsichord.

If this point seems specious, it need not be insisted on. Of greater importance is a

more general consideration which applies to the entire field of arranging (and therefore to the Corelli, Locatelli, and Valentini pieces, originally composed for violin): tone-colour became a fundamental element in the nature of a composition only during the nineteenth century, or, at the earliest, toward the end of the eighteenth. To an eighteenth-century composer, instrumental timbres were largely interchangeable. And this applies no less to music which one might imagine to be inextricably associated with a given instrument than to music whose medium appears at first sight to be a matter of indifference. For the former kind, witness the Bach violin concertos — and the composer's own arrangements of them for keyboard. For the latter, practically any eighteenth-century collection of trio sonatas will serve as illustration — composers went to extraordinary lengths to make it clear that almost any combination of violins, flutes, and oboes would serve for the two upper parts, and they were equally open-minded in their attitude to the bass part.

The position of some modern musicologists on these matters is nothing more or less than a paradox. What these gentlemen insist on is complete fidelity to the instrumental prescriptions of eighteenth-century composers. And yet what the eighteenth-century composers themselves expected was the exercise of the player's freedom and imagination, just

as much in the choice of instrument as in the matter of embellishing melodic lines and inserting cadential flourishes.

Thus what would have surprised the great violinist Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713) or his younger rival Giuseppe Valentini (1681–1753) or his pupil Pietro Locatelli (1695–1764) is not that their violin sonatas should be played by a cellist but that any musical society should be so hidebound as to object to the practice. Perhaps the pieces by Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741) and Luigi Boccherini (1743–1805) will soothe anyone who still has qualms: since the stringed instrument is here authentic, the purist may be recommended to raise only one eyebrow instead of two.

Bernard Jacobson, 1967

A Note by János Starker

String playing reached glorious peaks in the eighteenth century. The cello, however, having won neither the popularity of the violin nor players of comparable ability, did not receive much attention from the composers of the period.

In the nineteenth century, a number of virtuosos and teachers undertook the task of arranging for the cello hundreds of sonatas and suites written for violin or gamba in the previous century.

The realisation of the figured bass and the cadenzas often took on nineteenth-

century tendencies, and definite romantic influences slipped into the texts. This practice can be criticised; however, the service rendered by enriching the playable repertory for the cello was immensely valuable. These works have served as *hors d'oeuvres* for almost all cello recitals ever since. Considering the current popularity of the Baroque, they may remain so for a long time to come.

Here the cello is given a chance to sing in its best tonal range, and show its ability to match the virtuosity usually associated with the violin.

The presentation of these works invariably wavers between the attempted authentic style of the composer and the nineteenth-century characteristics added by the transcriber. Also the performer is tempted by the implied bel canto elements, and disciplined by contemporary requirements of fidelity to the written text.

Personally, I have always been guided by a strong drive toward technical perfection. At times this might seem to require expressive sacrifices. But in fact this would only be true if one placed the beauty of dynamic extremes and touchingly communicative emotional display above the beauty of purity, simplicity, and balance.

The first course indicates self-centred youthful exuberance with limited discipline, appealing in its humanity. The other demands self-imposed mature discipline,

respect for the total concept of a work and faultless execution.

One can argue the merits of each. My own preference is for the latter, despite its inherent dangers.

CD 5 MUSIC FOR CELLO AND PIANO BY BARTÓK, MENDELSSOHN, MARTINŰ, DEBUSSY, CHOPIN, WEINER

Probably few periods in Felix Mendelssohn's tranquil life were happier than the years of his late teens when, basking in the admiration of an adoring family, he found his own style as a composer and grew to poised maturity as a man. Most of the music he wrote at this time first saw the light of day under the parental roof, and so it must have been with the *Variations concertantes* in D, op.17. It was completed on 30 January 1829, when the composer was twenty, and dedicated to his brother, Paul.

Mendelssohn did not spare his brother in the technical demands of this piece, which is concerto-like in its virtuosity (nor does the pianist indulge in excessive leisure, either). At the same time, though the eight short variations (plus Coda) are fairly free and wide-ranging, they would not have shocked a Haydn or a Mozart: Mendelssohn's method is within the classic tradition, and the original theme is always discernible.

Martinů's *Variations on a Theme of Rossini* was written in 1942, the year after the composer fled Paris, his adopted home of seventeen years, for the safer shores of the United States. The American sojourn, which lasted until 1945, was a period of solid musical activity. It was also a time in which Martinů's music was accorded a lively appreciation in the USA: Koussevitsky commissioned the first symphony, and three others were written before the composer returned to Europe to become a professor at the Prague Conservatory.

The Variations are four in number. The first two, both Allegro, elaborate on the melodic outlines of the original (with sudden reversions to thematic bits which are all but intact); the third, a peaceful Andante, ventures farthest afield and makes much of the interval of the major second; the fourth returns closer to home, and leads at last into a triumphant recapitulation of the theme itself.

In October 1829, when he was nineteen and still firmly rooted at home in Warsaw, Chopin took a week's holiday to visit Prince Anton Radziwiłł and his family at their estate in the Poznań district. The trip was beneficial — not, as Chopin's father had hoped, in terms of financial aid from the Prince, but in helping the young composer over the first attack of love (unrequited), which had stirred a Byronic despair in his heart during the preceding months in

Warsaw. The young Radziwiłł princesses, Wanda and Elise, were effective tonic, and in his restored good spirits Chopin wrote the *Polonaise brillante* (minus its Introduction, which came later) for Wanda and her cello-playing father.

Chopin himself was inclined to belittle his efforts on this occasion, and later informed a friend: "I wrote an *Alla Polacca* with cello accompaniment ... It is nothing more than a brilliant drawing-room piece suitable for the ladies. I should like Princess Wanda to practice it. I am supposed to have given her lessons. She is a beautiful girl of 17, and it was charming to guide her delicate fingers."

The outbreak of war in 1914 found Debussy, at fifty-two, sick of cancer and gripped by depression. "It is almost impossible to work," he wrote. "To tell the truth one hardly dares to, for the asides of war are more distressing than one imagines." But the summer of 1915, which he spent at Pourville, near Dieppe, brought him fresh vigour. In the space of a few months he wrote works for piano and two of a projected six sonatas for various instruments. The first of these was the Sonata for Cello and Piano.

Debussy, like others before and after him, was fascinated by the symbolic, tragicomic figure of the Harlequin, and it casts some light on the paradoxes of the Cello Sonata to know that the proposed title of the piece was *Pierrot fâché avec la lune*.

The first movement, marked by an economy new in Debussy's music, is quite tightly knit. Its events grow out of two motives: the first introduced immediately by the piano, the second soon afterwards by the cello. Both circle closely around the D minor triad, transformed to major in the final measure of the movement when, below the cello's open fifth in harmonics, the piano touches quietly on a single F sharp.

In the second movement (*Sérénade* — a Harlequinesque title in view of the cryptic and rather ominous character of the music) it has been suggested that the cello imitates a guitar, a mandolin, a tambourine, and a flute. The ear lends credence to this, though only the last (*flautendo*) is indicated in the score. The Serenade leads without a break into the Finale, in which the merry folkish spirit and the fine confidence of the cello theme are strangely contradicted midway by the cello's sudden decline into a mournful and downcast passage marked *con morbidezza*. A subsequent almost frantic burst of activity, however, restores the air of optimism.

The year 1928 was one of great productivity for Bartók and, along with much else, he wrote two Rhapsodies for Violin and Piano — both of which he arranged for cello and piano as well as violin and orchestra.

The Rhapsody No.1 is dedicated to Joseph Szigeti, with whom the composer

played it at a Coolidge Festival concert on his second — and permanent — removal to the US in 1940. It is an engaging and approachable work based on Hungarian folk tunes, one of which bears startling resemblance to the Shaker hymn so familiar through Copland's *Appalachian Spring*. The Rhapsody is divided into the traditional *lassú* and *friss* (slow and quick) sections of the typical national Hungarian dance.

Leó Weiner (1885–1960) was a native of Budapest who spent most of his mature life as a professor at the Budapest Academy of Music, where he himself was trained. Despite the implications of the title of *Lakodalmas* (Hungarian Wedding Dance), his interest in genuine Hungarian folk music was considerably cooler than that of his compatriots Bartók and Kodály, and he worked essentially within the European classic-romantic tradition.

Shirley Fleming, 1965

CD 6 BRAHMS: CELLO SONATAS 1 & 2

The E minor Sonata is the work of a thirty-two-year-old choir director who has yet to produce his first symphony; the F major Sonata is that of a fifty-three-year-old master whose four symphonies, and much else besides, have earned him an undisputed place in the apostolic

succession of Bach, Beethoven and Berlioz. Twenty-one years of change and development separate these two sonatas, and yet there are no marked disparities of style when one turns from the first to the second side of this record: Brahms' musical *Weltanschauung* has not really changed from Opus 38 to Opus 99. In both sonatas the form is studiously classical, the content glowingly romantic. It is the architect who formulates the plans but the poet who calls the tune. "One sees what can still be done with the old forms when someone comes along who knows how to handle them," remarked no less an authority than Richard Wagner when Brahms came for a visit in 1864 and performed some of his piano music. But this respectful adherence to the "old forms" ultimately proved to be more than Wagner and the other "Futurists" could bear. Even Tchaikovsky, who took a dim view of the Wagnerites, felt that Brahms' position was hopelessly outdated. "Isn't Brahms in reality a caricature of Beethoven?" he says in one of his letters. "Isn't this pretension to profundity and power detestable, because the contents that are poured into the Beethoven mould are not really of any value?"

It was difficult to see, at close range, that Brahms' conservatism in the face of the Wagnerian revolution concealed a radicalism of his own. He works instinctively within the established order because the tightest

forms provide the richest harmonic contrasts: Brahms is interested in sounding new depths where Wagner's main ambition is to reach new heights. One of Brahms' youthful notebooks contains a significant reference to the "inner sound" of music and a reminder that "the real musician should reverberate with music within himself." This inward resonance was to become the hallmark and desideratum of Brahms' style, and its realisation involves the use of a rich, sombre palette of instruments in the middle range. Cello, French horn and clarinet are cornerstones of his orchestral sound as well as his chamber music. And in his vocal works, whenever he comes closest to giving a confessional account of his own alienation from the world — in the *Four Serious Songs*, for example, or the *Alto Rhapsody* on Goethe's lines about a wanderer in a wasteland — Brahms gravitates to low voices and dark chest-tones.

The two cello sonatas are "serious songs" of a no less personal kind, with the same crimson thread of melancholy running through them both. The E minor Sonata came into existence in 1865, soon after the death of Brahms' mother, at a time when he was also at work on *A German Requiem*. A composer less practiced in the art of writing *lieder* might have had difficulty adjusting the dynamic balance of two such unequal partners, but the virtuoso Brahms

is capable of taking an almost deferential part in this dialogue between the stentorian concert grand and the bel canto cello. On many pages of this sonata the piano performs veritable prodigies of self-restraint in the interests of equilibrium; one particularly happy example occurs in the middle section of the minuet, when the piano does something that can best be described as a "hesitation step," while waiting to follow the cello — after you, my dear Gaston! The work has only three movements. The first is a long, brilliantly worked out Allegro non troppo, the second an Allegretto quasi menuetto; the third a fugal Allegro based on three subjects, of which the first is clearly descended from the sixteenth and seventeenth *Kontrapunkte* of Bach's *Art of the Fugue*.

The F major Sonata was written during the summer of 1886 at Thun, Switzerland, at a time when Brahms was writing a good deal of chamber music with a view to expanding the existing repertory. "I am sorry to say that among the so-called better classes it is no longer fashionable to play anything but the piano," he wrote to a Swiss friend. "Would it be too much to ask parents to let their children learn some other instruments? Violin, cello, flute, clarinet, horn, etc. That would create more interest for all possible sorts of music." The Second Sonata begins with an Allegro vivace in which F major, F sharp minor and F minor

are subtly played off against each other. In the slow movement, Adagio affettuoso, the pattern is reversed: F sharp major and F minor are juxtaposed. According to some critics, the third movement, Allegro passionato, bears a family resemblance to the finale of Brahms' Third Symphony, and in the concluding Allegro molto there may be an allusion to the student song *Ich hab mich ergeben*, which also occurs in the *Academic Festival Overture*.

All this, of course, is intensely "classical" music, yet there are lessons here for even the most revolutionary modernist. Arnold Schoenberg says that Brahms' music taught him four important elements of style. The first is melodic assymetry, "especially uneven numbers of measures; extension and contraction of phrases." The second is elasticity of form: "not being stingy or cramped when clarity demands more space; carrying out each figure to the end." The third is "the systematic construction of movements"; and finally, "economy, yet richness." There is, after all, much to be done with the old forms when someone comes along who knows how to handle them.

Frederic V. Grunfeld, 1965

CD 7 MENDELSSOHN & CHOPIN: CELLO SONATAS

Felix Mendelssohn's seventh trip to England in 1842 served as a welcome respite from the problems and complexities of his duties as *kapellmeister* to the King of Prussia in Berlin, his position as Music Director of the king's planned Academy of Arts (so slow in its realisation), and his responsibilities as Director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Concerts. He was hailed by the British for his newly composed Scotch Symphony as well as for his piano and organ playing, and he received the honour of two commands to visit Buckingham Palace. The return of the composer, together with his wife, Cécile, to Berlin was, however, delayed for almost three months, during which time they visited his relatives in Frankfurt and indulged in a month's vacation in Switzerland, and he opened the Leipzig concert season.

Once back in Berlin in October, Mendelssohn discovered that the plans for the Academy of Arts had bogged down, that preparations for even the building of a music school had not been consummated. In irritation he resigned, but the King of Prussia persuaded him to remain as "General Music Director." The thirty-seven-year-old Mendelssohn would be in charge not only of church music and a newly

organised choir and orchestra but would also supply incidental music for some of the king's dramatic projects: *Athalie*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; furthermore, the composer was not obliged to reside in Berlin.

One of Mendelssohn's ardent desires, the establishment of a Leipzig conservatory, was considerably furthered through the approval of the King of Saxony shortly after Mendelssohn arrived in that city in November. On the twenty-eighth of the month, he wrote to his mother, "... You have no idea of the mass of affairs — musical, practical, and social — that have passed over my writing table since my return here. The weekly concerts; the extra ones; the money which the King has at last bestowed, at my request, on the Leipzigers, and for the judicious expenditure of which I only yesterday had to furnish the draft; the proofreading of 'Antigone' and of the A minor symphony [Scotch] — score and parts — and a huge pile of letters. These are the principal things, which, however, branch off into a mass of secondary ones. Besides, Raupach has already sent me the first chorus of 'Athalie'. The 'Midsummer Night's Dream' and 'Oedipus' are revolving more busily in my head every day; I am really anxious at last to make 'Walpurgisnacht' into a symphony-cantata — for which it was originally intended, but did not become one from want of courage on my part — and

also to complete my cello sonata..."

In the midst of all this hectic activity, Mendelssohn's mother, Lea, died on 12 December. Berlioz visited Leipzig and conducted there the following spring, the conservatory was finally opened, the long-awaited Bach monument was unveiled, and the composer's fourth son, named Felix, was born. The feverish musical existence continued undiminished: "... You want me to write you about new music?" a letter to Karl Klingemann on 12 June 1843 reads. "I am shortly going to send four manuscripts at once to publishers in various parts of the world: the 'Walpurgisnacht', a sonata for piano and violoncello, four songs for a single voice, and six songs to be sung in the open air, for four mixed voices. As long as the compositions remain here with me they never cease to torment me, because I so dislike to see such nice, clean manuscripts pass into the dirty hands of engravers, customers and the public, and I bolster up a little here, smooth out a little there and go on improving them just in order to keep them here. But when the proofs are once here, they are as foreign and indifferent to me as if they had been written by a stranger."

The pressure of the King of Prussia's commissions, Mendelssohn's increasing activities in Berlin (September and October saw the productions of *Antigone* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) made it

imperative that he leave Leipzig and move back to that city. He took part in the Gewandhaus Concerts through the middle of November — the final one a farewell program on the eighteenth, included the Octet and the new cello sonata — and then settled with his family in Berlin.

The Cello Sonata No.2 in D, op.58, was dedicated to Count Matvei Wielhorsky, an excellent amateur cellist from Russia who also was the dedicatee of the op.47 Piano Quartet by Mendelssohn's friend and fellow teacher at the Leipzig Conservatory, Robert Schumann. There are four movements: Allegro assai vivace; Allegretto scherzando; Adagio; and the Finale: Molto allegro e vivace.

Frédéric Chopin is not usually associated with the cello, yet in the catalogue of his compositions there are three works specifically written for that instrument: an Introduction and Polonaise in C, op.3 (1830), a Grand Duo in E on themes from Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* (1832), and the present Sonata pour Piano et Violoncelle in G minor, op.65, begun in the autumn of 1845.

"I don't play much, for my piano is out of tune, and I compose even less," wrote Chopin to his family from George Sand's estate at Nohant, a hundred and fifty-seven miles south of Paris, where he spend the autumn of that year. His relationship with the colourful novelist had long since dwindled to a platonic arrangement, but even that state was wearing thin due to

domestic crisis. Chopin, commencing work on the Cello Sonata, the Barcarolle, and the Polonaise-Fantaisie, was continually being distracted by the quarrels of the Sand family, in which he sided with George's daughter, Solange, against her son, Maurice, her adopted daughter, Augustine, and George herself. Although he hoped to complete these works while at Nohant, because "I cannot write in the winter," Chopin returned to Paris in November 1845, with the still-unfinished manuscripts.

By the beginning of the summer, the composer was back at Nohant, trying with difficulty to put up with the increasingly hostile atmosphere. "I am doing everything I can to work," he wrote to Franchomme, dedicatee of the Cello Sonata, "but without success. If this goes on, my new compositions will no longer suggest the warbling of birds or even the crash of breaking china. I must resign myself to this." Lucrezia Floriani, George Sand's thinly disguised portrait of herself and Chopin, had just been published serially in Paris, and the novelist's unsympathetic treatment of the male protagonist immediately became the favourite gossip of the salons. Chopin's visitors to Nohant that summer, too, were well aware of the antagonistic air of the household. The composer, still dependent on George Sand's maternal personality, chose more and more to withdraw to his room in order to avoid open conflict.

"I wish I could fill my letter with the most cheering reports," he wrote to his family on 11 October, "but I know nothing except that I love you ... With my sonata for cello and piano I am now contented, now discontented. I lay it aside, then pick it up again ... While I am composing a piece it seems good to me; otherwise I wouldn't write it down. Only later there comes reflection, rejecting or accepting it." On the tenth of November Chopin left for Paris, never again to return to Nohant. His feelings for George Sand had degenerated, at least on the surface, to politeness.

In April 1847, the cellist Franchomme and the composer played the completed sonata at a soirée given at Chopin's lodgings for Delphine Potacka. Following the revisions of this work two months later, he signed a contract with Breitkopf and Härtel in Leipzig and Brandus et Cie in Paris for its publication, along with the three mazurkas, op.63, and the three waltzes (including the "Minute"), op.64. These were the last compositions to be printed in his lifetime.

On Wednesday 16 February 1848, a distinguished audience of three hundred heard the final three movements of the Cello Sonata as part of Chopin's first recital in Paris in six years. The concert, an enormous success for the pianist, was also to be his last in that city and again included the services of his good friend Auguste-Joseph Franchomme.

Chopin first met Franchomme (1808–84) when he arrived in Paris in 1831 and was introduced to all the leading musicians of the day. The cellist, later a professor at the Conservatoire, often took part in the musical soirées at which Chopin appeared and soon became an intimate friend of the composer. They collaborated on the Grand Duo in E, and Franchomme not only assisted Chopin with the revision of the cello part in the op.3 Polonaise but even helped him prepare a thematic catalogue of his works. Upon Chopin's return from England late in 1848, Franchomme took charge of the ailing composer's precarious financial affairs and at his death was one of the pallbearers. A few days before he died, just after he had received the last sacraments, Chopin asked Franchomme to play something; the opening measures of the Cello Sonata, however, were terminated by a recurrence of the composer's racking coughing fit.

The G minor Sonata contains the following movements: Allegro moderato; Scherzo: Allegro con brio; Largo; and Finale: Allegro.

Igor Kipnis, 1963

CD 8 DVOŘÁK CELLO CONCERTO BRUCH: KOL NIDREI

"Why on earth didn't I know that a person could write a violoncello concerto like this? If I had only known, I would have written one long ago." These words were spoken after a first examination of the new Cello Concerto by Antonín Dvořák. The speaker was no less than Johannes Brahms, Dvořák's long-time friend and champion, who seemed to have forgotten for the moment that he himself had only recently completed the magnificent Double Concerto for Violin, Cello and Orchestra.

Brahms was not the only composer who realised the many problems involved in writing a work for cello and orchestra. Although the cello has an exceptionally wide range, its more easily accessible notes lie well below the normal melodic surface of the orchestra, making it difficult to penetrate a heavy fabric of orchestral accompaniment. Besides, while a good player can perform great feats of virtuosity on the instrument, it still lacks the exciting tonal brilliance of the violin. Perhaps that is why so few really fine compositions for cello exist in the concerto literature. Of these, performers and listeners alike are in general agreement that the Dvořák Concerto belongs in the very front rank — many say at the top of the list.

It was another cello concerto — the second by Victor Herbert (recorded on Mercury MG 50286/SR 90286) — that inspired Dvořák to write his sole work in this form. In March 1894, during his last year as head of the National Conservatory of Music in New York, the Czech composer heard Herbert play his new concerto for the first time with the New York Philharmonic in Carnegie Hall. He was so moved by the experience that he determined to write a cello concerto of his own. His friend and compatriot, Hanuš Wihan, Professor of Cello at the Prague Conservatory, had long been pressing him for such a work; and now he saw his way clear to creating it.

Dvořák began work on the concerto in New York in November 1894, and completed it the following February. During that period, he had the assistance of Alwin Schroeder, first cellist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, who offered advice on certain technical details.

Wihan, too, had some advice of his own to give. When Dvořák returned to Prague in April 1895, the Czech cellist took great pains to edit the solo part, adding bowings and fingerings. Evidently he wanted to go even further and add some of his own inventions, including a cadenza in the last movement. For his collaboration on the work, Dvořák dedicated the concerto to Wihan. But he feared that Wihan might try to interfere in the correction of the proofs. Therefore, on 3 October 1895, he felt

impelled to write to his publisher, Simrock: “My friend Wihan and I have differed as to certain things. Many of the passages do not please me, and I must insist that my work be printed as I have written it. In certain places the passages may, indeed, be printed in two versions — a comparatively easy and a more difficult one. Above all, I give you my work only if you will promise me that no one — not even my friend Wihan — shall make any alteration in it without my knowledge and permission — also no cadenza such as Wihan has made in the last movement — and that its form shall be as I have felt it and thought it out. The cadenza in the last movement is not to exist either in the orchestral or the piano score: I informed Wihan, when he showed it to me, that it is impossible to insert one. The finale closes gradually, *diminuendo* — like a breath — with reminiscences of the first and second movements; the solo dies away to a *pianissimo*, then there is a *crescendo*, and the last measures are taken up by the orchestra, ending stormily. That was my idea, and from it I cannot recede.”

It may have been the differences between Dvořák and Wihan which account for the fact that the latter was not the soloist at the concerto’s premiere. This took place at a concert of the London Philharmonic Orchestra on 19 March 1896. The composer conducted, and the soloist was the young English cellist Leo Stern, who came to

Prague especially to study the work with Dvořák, and who returned there to play the concerto on 9 April. Later, Stern introduced it to New York and Chicago. The first American performance, however, was given, appropriately, by Schroeder with the Boston Symphony on 19 December 1896.

Though the concerto was written in New York, there is nothing which relates it musically to Dvořák’s other American compositions. By the time he came to work on it, he was far too homesick to put anything of the New World into it. His thoughts were with his native land, and the spirit of the music is entirely Czech.

The concerto is scored for woodwinds in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, kettledrums, triangle and strings. It is in the customary three movements. The first movement is an even-flowing Allegro, with a sturdy first subject and a rich, melodic second theme, first announced by the solo horn. There is a feeling of quiet reserve about the second movement, Adagio ma non troppo, which includes a brief cadenza for the solo instrument. The Finale: Allegro moderato, is almost march-like in character. Its rather unusual ending has already been described in the composer’s own words. But another unusual feature, which occurs shortly before the end, is a duet for the solo cellist and the orchestra’s concertmaster.

Paul Affelder, 1962

It is a sort of musical compliment to Max Bruch’s long devotion to folk music that what is considered one of his most representative works should have sprung from an alien tradition. Along with his First Violin Concerto, *Kol Nidrei*, an “Adagio for violoncello based on a Hebrew melody,” is today the most frequently heard composition by a composer who was a contemporary of Brahms, but who survived him by almost a quarter of a century. The traditional Hebrew chant has been treated with such conviction, however, by this Lutheran grandson of an eminent German clergyman, that it is more familiar to concert-goers than his earlier *Kyrie*, *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei* (op.37).

Bruch had a lifelong devotion to folk music, and became somewhat of an authority on German, Russian and Swedish music, some of which he drew upon in his Songs and Dances (opp.63 and 79). His *Adagio on Celtic Melodies* and better-known *Scottish Fantasy* (op.46) explore yet other sources and his deep interest in folk art might well have influenced Vaughan Williams when that celebrated folklorist studied with him.

International in his travels as in his musical interests, Bruch was serving as conductor of the Liverpool Philharmonic Society at the time he composed *Kol Nidrei*. It received its first performance, however, at a concert of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra on 20 October 1881.

For the basis of his composition, Bruch quite literally drew upon what is regarded as one of the most sacred of Hebrew melodies, customarily chanted on the eve of the Day of Atonement. This prayer, the Universal Jewish Encyclopedia explains, serves to annul “all vows made in any form whatsoever during the course of the year, insofar as they concern one’s own person.”

The personalised solemnity of the original melody is most appropriately paralleled by the timbre of the solo cello, which intones it first, unadorned. Variations expand on the original theme and lead to a secondary subject, pronounced by the orchestra first, this time, and then assigned to the solo instrument. The original theme is recalled as the work concludes in a sombre mood.

Harold Lawrence

CD 9 SCHUMANN · LALO: CELLO CONCERTOS

János Starker, who began to play the cello in Budapest in 1933, at the age of nine, first appeared on the musical horizons of a New Yorker in 1949, when he moved from Dallas to be first cello of the Metropolitan Opera. The Met Orchestra was then being beefed up, smoothed down and licked (not to say whipped) into shape by the remarkable combination of Fritz Reiner and George Szell

(both Hungarians); it had never played so well before, and it hasn’t played so well since. By common consent, the most improved section was the cellos, and the credit went, quite legitimately, to the twenty-five-year-old new section leader. Starker was already an experienced man — he had been first cello of the Budapest Opera four years before.

By 1949, Starker spoke a recognisable English, somewhat distorted by his year of “priding myself on my ability to interpret Texan,” and people outside the Hungarian community of musicians had got to know him. He was already a pretty fierce specimen — a muscular, terrifyingly bright young man, with black eyes staring out below black eyebrows and an almost bald head. If there had been no Yul Brynner, Starker could have invented one. Technically, he was a cellist of almost unbelievable skill, who had developed personal techniques of both bowing and fingering; musically, his taste was severe, as befitted a man brought up on Bach and Bartók. He could play loud and soft, *legato*, *staccato* and *molto agitato*, with that angry, biting attack which is so much more convincing on the cello than on the other strings. He always made musical sense as well as musical sounds. Fritz Reiner thought he was phenomenal, and when Reiner left to become conductor of the Chicago Symphony he took Starker with him.

Apart from a few months in a string

quartet on the Riviera, Starker had spent 1946 and 1947 in Paris, thinking about what he wanted to do, and not playing much. He had decided a long time before — he says, when he was nine — on a career as a solo cellist. When Antal Dorati (another Hungarian) brought him from Paris to Dallas in 1948, he determined to make his career from an American base. Leaving the Met in 1952, he planned on five years with Reiner in Chicago — he was already a family man, with a four-year-old daughter, and he had to get established. World events disrupted his planning; his parents escaped from Budapest in the aftermath of the abortive Revolution, and he served another year in the relative anonymity of the orchestra to bring them to America.

Starker has never regretted his time in Chicago. “Playing with Reiner,” he once said, “you learn something new at every rehearsal!” He still wears as a souvenir of the Chicago days a tiepin given to him by the members of his section to commemorate an event of the last season. Reiner, who had been as close to Starker as he ever permitted himself to be with an employee, had paid public tribute to his retiring first cellist shortly before a performance of the Verdi *Requiem*. At the final rehearsal, however, Starker forgot to count during a passage for unaccompanied sopranos, and came in, loudly, a bar too soon. Reiner gave him an infuriated look

and threw his baton violently to the ground, where it snapped. Some time passed before the two men made it up, and in the interim the section bought Starker a gold tiepin in the shape of a broken baton.

As part of his campaign for solo status, Starker, while still at the Met, began making records, first for Period, a little company owned by another Hungarian. Later he moved his allegiance to Angel, where he worked for Walter Legge, who is English but easily recognisable to a Hungarian as a character out of a Molnár play. His first contact with any American lady in any business, however, had been with Wilma Cozart of Mercury, to whom Dorati had introduced him as he arrived in Dallas.

“I understood no more than ten per cent of what she said,” Starker recalls. (This is not too bad an average: Miss Cozart is a flower of Southern femininity, whose native tongue is not always recognised as English by those brought up outside the Confederate States.) “But it was charming.” There is a kind of pleasant justice in the idea that Starker, now thoroughly American and independent, with all the Hungarian leading strings cut, should wind up on the Mercury label.

Like all string players, Starker has a deep love for chamber music, which he played virtually on a non-stop basis while at the Budapest Conservatory (“with professionals, with other students, with

amateurs — doctors and such”). He does not refer to an “accompanist”; instead, he says he has “formed a duo” with the pianist György Sebök, an old friend from Conservatory days and a *grand prix* winner on his own. Starker also has an interest in teaching, which he does in the summer at Indiana University, where he makes his home. A few years ago, he helped the composer Roy Harris, whose new cello concerto he commissioned on a Ford grant, to lay out the plans for the first International String Congress. And he writes, not always for a professional audience — this year he had an article in *Mademoiselle*. “I have gone into competition with you,” he told a writer recently, “but only because I found I could get paid for it.” Ahem.

In common with other modern cellists, Starker has an interesting love-hate relationship with Casals, the idol of his youth, who virtually reinvented the instrument and introduced a generation to the remarkable music written for it. But Starker feels strongly that both the technique of the instrument and the interpretation of cello pieces have advanced beyond what Casals did. “Once I played Bach like Casals,” Starker says, “but I have learned better. Students must learn the modern approach to the instrument.”

Partly because of Casals’ great success in its early years, this century has been big for cellists. Composers as different from

each other as Hindemith, Walton, Bloch, Virgil Thomson, Shostakovich, Britten, Samuel Barber, Kodály and Elliott Carter wrote major works for the instrument. Competition was heavy, too. Without thinking about it, anybody who kept in touch could reel off the names of half a dozen good cellists — Piatigorsky, Rose, Schuster, Fournier, Garbousova, Silva, Janigro, Greenhouse, Rostropovich, as well as Starker. Starker this year has more major solo dates than any of the others. That he has risen to the top of such company is a great tribute to his technique, his musical perceptions and his tough intelligence. It is also a tribute to the taste of the people who hand out the rewards in the musical world, because Starker has not pandered to the big audience in programme or personality.

He is a serious man, a major figure on the musical scene. The next generation of cellists may well be rebelling against Starker’s dominance and authority just the way he rebels today against Casals.

Martin Mayer, 1963

CD 10
TCHAIKOVSKY: ROCOCO VARIATIONS
SAINT-SAËNS: CELLO CONCERTO

Saint-Saëns once remarked: “I am called eclectic in style and I know that I am. This is perhaps a great defect, but it is impossible

for me to correct it. One cannot alter one’s nature.”

Thus, this often prodigious composer probably pinpointed his work procedures and creative outlook as succinctly as any of his admirers or critics, past or present. Though chameleonly gifted, he was rarely an innovator, but rather a perfecter of techniques pioneered by others. This does not mean that he was a slavish imitator. A cultivated intellectual with scholarly tastes, ranging from catholic enthusiasms and an analytically-oriented mind, he sometimes simply became so involved in amplifying and extending the original ideas of others that he had little time to dream up tradition-breaking inventions of his own.

Yet, the immediate charm and genuine sincerity of much of his musical thought, firmly underpinned by formidable skill as a manipulator of form and orchestral devices, helped to make him a dominant force on the international musical scene for nearly sixty of the eighty-five years he lived (1835–1921) — and to establish him in the hierarchy of composers of the past still popular and respected in our own day. As the distinguished American musicologist-critic Harold C. Schonberg noted: “Saint-Saëns is not one of the immortals but, for all-round musicianship and natural gifts, he was on the level of a Mozart or a Mendelssohn.”

One of the better pianist-organists of his time, Saint-Saëns could be fiery in public

posture. Privately, he was essentially retiring. Liszt, a longtime friend and sometime mentor, described him as being “constantly engrossed to the point of bemusement in assaying creative processes in music.” Reportedly, he was also unassuming about his talents. As a composer, he seems to have thought of himself more as an artisan than as an artist, more in terms of craftsmanship than craftiness.

The might of effect which he mustered in his Third Symphony through precise thought and sheer technical prowess prompted his former teacher Gounod to hail him as “the French Beethoven.” But, truth told, while Saint-Saëns could manage admirably palpable power in his musical designs, it was beyond the force of his temper to achieve the sort of iconoclastic, heaven-storming thrust typical of a Beethoven. In his finest works, he created tonal canvasses of the most impressive, neatly balanced and durably satisfying order; however, when fashioning them, he stayed conservatively in the middle of the mainstream of musical expression current to him, seldom dealing either in the thinking of the tentative tinter or the tempestuous titan.

Meanwhile, it remains very much to the credit of Saint-Saëns that, in his best works, he appears to have selected several founts of inspiration simultaneously by careful choice, and to have been refreshed to a point of personal vigour most of the times

that he drank at them. As the late French man-of-letters Romain Rolland commented: "He is tormented by no passions, but nothing disturbs the lucidity of his mind ... He brings into the midst of our present restlessness something of the sweetness and clarity of past periods, something that seems like fragments of a vanished world."

His background as an outstanding performer equipped Saint-Saëns as a composer with a special understanding of the needs and means to which a virtuoso must set his executant hands. In his prolifically large output, whether he wrote for the more-than-average pianist, organist, violinist, cellist, harpist or whomsoever, he delved deeply into considerations of a performer's physical potentialities as well as the compass and limitations of a specific instrument under soloistic conditions. Thus, his numerous works utilising solo instruments call for the player to apply not only the rule of his basic thumb but also that of the remaining fingers of the same hand and all the digits of the other. Literally, the player is given two very full fistfuls to cope with on a purely technical level. And, additionally, he must exercise powers of intellectual probity, tonal polish and applause-winning flair. Often, Saint-Saëns seeks from his soloists effects of spirit and gravity; invariably, he demands brilliance and solid control for the proper projection of his ideas.

One of his paramount essays for solo player and orchestra is his delightful Concerto in A minor for cello and orchestra, the first and most frequently performed of two such works for that combination of instruments. Written in his thirty-eighth year (1872), it reveals him at the height of the first full flush of his maturity. The major work preceding it was the symphonic poem *Omphale's Spinning Wheel*; that following was the symphonic poem *Phaeton*. In the meantime, in the concerto idiom, he had already introduced his first three piano concertos and his first two for violin.

In certain ways, in this first cello concerto, he followed the accepted, orthodox procedures established by Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven — and even those of such individualistic "benders" of concerto structure as Schumann, Liszt and Brahms. But, characteristically, he moulded these models very much to the personal mode of his own hand. Here, though closely applied to the frame of the formal concerto, the substance of Saint-Saëns' imagery is shaped provocatively after methods of fairly free rhapsodising within that frame.

In the first movement (*Allegro non troppo*), the cello states the principal theme over quiverings of the higher orchestral strings. This melody, pervasive in later use, is developed by the soloist, then elaborated upon in concerted exchange with full orchestra. Two other themes are then

introduced, separate ideas subsequently contrasting, then blending in effects of increasing brilliance. There is an easome transition into the second movement (*Allegretto con moto*), a graceful section shot through with dance-like themes. A reminder of earlier motifs returns as the finale (*Come prima, un peu moins vite*) — deliciously chock-full with dazzling passage-work for the cellist — begins its exciting progress toward a striking, capping climax.

Although Tchaikovsky's music rarely betrays the influence, he delighted in studying the scores of Mozart. Mozart was his idol of idols: "the greatest of all composers," even "the Christ among composers".

This taste, plus a general love for other eighteenth-century music of a Rococo persuasion, explains the countless minuets and other pieces invoking the century prior to his strewn through Tchaikovsky's catalogue. Admittedly, he often "turned his ear backward" during those recurring periods when brooding seized him and he felt "no desire to compose ... disposed only to take on some easy, small-scaled work in relaxation".

At such times, he would usually settle upon a collection of folk or liturgical melodies, select a few and arrange them for chorus — or he would undertake an outright "hack" orchestration of some

salon piece or other popular at the moment. Occasionally, he would orchestrate pieces by earlier composers (like the four by Mozart which form his *Orchestral Suite No.4*, subtitled "*Mozartiana*"). Finally, he would simply turn to composing in what he called "an antique style".

Amusingly, in spite of his avid taste for older music and basic good intentions, most of his music (arranged or original) dealing with older styles winds up being about three-parts Tchaikovsky and one-part source. A minuet never comes out quite sounding really like a minuet. But, perhaps one should approach such Tchaikovskian concoctions much as one does a pleasing cocktail. Each component ingredient in itself has excellent, even self-sufficient properties. Together, the ingredients blend into something new and distinctive. As such, the raw materials are forgotten — and, usually, quite properly so. You might like your vermouth or your gin neat — but find a martini *also* palatable.

The *Variations on a Rococo Theme for Cello and Orchestra* derives from this persuasion. It has moments in it which seem to recreate eighteenth-century manner and mode in charming fashion. But, from the very announcement of its theme — one beautifully fecund to development after the procedures of the variations form — we know that the romantic in expression will rule over the

rococo. The theme itself sounds “antique” enough until, at the very end of its statement, we hear comments which could only have come from Tchaikovsky’s pen. From there, we shift entertainingly between the shades of older ideas and the lights of newer expressions — at least those new in Tchaikovsky’s heyday. But, in end effect, there is no clash: the *Rococo Variations*, Tchaikovsky’s finest composition for solo instrument and orchestra aside from the First Piano Concerto and the Violin Concerto, casts a very large illumination on the idea and ideals of what such a solo-concerted piece should be.

It would be difficult to better the brief, precise description of the *Variations* given by Edwin Evans in his now standard biography of Tchaikovsky: “It is known to all cellists

as one of the finest display pieces in existence, but it has greater qualities than that. Each variation has a charm and piquancy of its own and is accompanied by orchestration of that lucid, dainty type of which Tchaikovsky was such a master when it suited his purpose.”

The formal shape is that of theme and seven variational sections (if one is fussy in analysis, one can add two cadenzas as separate sections). The writing for solo instrument is so deliciously “right” that the sound transmitted to the ear is somehow almost tasted on the tongue. As English musicologist Eric Blom said: “The cello’s abnormally, almost freakishly wide range is exploited here to the full with the greatest vivacity and brilliance.”

Edward Cole, 1965

János Starker & Antal Dorati

Photos by Harold Lawrence



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Starker with Stanisław Skrowaczewski & the LSO

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